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Lawler put up fight, was struck 17 times

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Former City Councilman J. Edward Lawler put up a fight when he was being attacked with part of a pair of bolt cutters before he fell to the kitchen floor next to the stove. He died after 17 blows to his head.

Other details about his death were also disclosed yesterday during preliminary hearings for the four people charged in connection with his slaying. A South Richmond grand jury is scheduled to consider indictments March 14.

First-degree murder and robbery charges were sent on to the grand jury for Carl G. Simons, 25; Timothy N. Dickenson, 20; and Juanita M. Ballard, 18. A capital murder charge against John Robert Ballard, 17, was referred to the grand jury.

The preliminary hearing for John Ballard, who is accused of doing the killing, was closed to the public yesterday morning after his lawyer and a prosecutor told the juvenile court judge that this was their wish.

Yesterday afternoon, preliminary hearings were held in another court for the others. Testimony and lawyers' comments included statements that:

- John Ballard kept hitting Lawler, 74, because he kept getting up and would not stay on the floor.
- Juanita Ballard blamed herself for the legal problems all were facing because she knew Lawler and had known him for about two years.
- Dickenson, according to a prosecutor, is the least culpable of all defendants.
- A day after the slaying, Juanita Ballard's 1965 Dodge Dart, which was used as the getaway car, was sold for about \$200 to Blackburn Used Cars on Jefferson Davis Highway and a van was later purchased by Simons from its owner.
- Simons took a newspaper clipping about the Dec. 30 slaying and some old coins to someone named "Buddy" and bragged he had killed Lawler.
- The chief investigator in the case refuses to identify a key individual who helped break the case because "at this point the informant's life is in danger."

Initially, when Simons and Dickenson were arrested here and the Ballards were arrested near Fort Pierce, Fla., all were charged with capital murder.

But near the end of the nearly three hours of testimony, Assistant Commonwealth's Attorney Warren VonSchuch indicated to Richmond General District Court Judge Melvin R. Hughes that charges against Miss Ballard, Simons and Dickenson needed to be reduced because only the "triggerman" can be convicted of capital murder.

The main witnesses yesterday before Judge Hughes were Richmond Detective James S. Gaudet, who related what Simons and Dickenson told him, and Florida Department of Law Enforcement Special Agent Susan Koteen, who interviewed Miss Ballard.

According to those statements, some of which seemed to be inconsistent at times and which were not read in full, the Ballards, Simons and Dickenson were driving to Lawler's Riverside Drive residence when the subject of a robbery was brought up.

Dickenson said he did not want any part of such an action, but did not get out of the car because of the cold weather, according to the statements' account. Simons, who was dating Miss Ballard but did not know her last name, was told by her that she knew Lawler.

When they arrived at Lawler's house, the statements said, Miss Ballard went inside and had two drinks with Lawler. At one point, he received a telephone call and later told her that "those women" were always calling and asking for money.

Lawler asked her what she was going to do New Year's Eve, but she did not give a firm commitment. She left the house on two occasions, trying to get him to leave with her. Once, he locked the front door, but the second time, he did not and the three others came inside while she waited in the car, the statements indicated.

The struggle apparently started in a room that was used for a den, where police found a pool of blood and a piece from an antique chair. Blood was found leading to the kitchen, which was found in disarray, Gaudet testified.

Lawler was clothed in a grayish suit, which had a red checkerlike pattern, a white shirt with red polka dots, burgundy-colored socks and reddish brown loafers, color photographs showed.

While Lawler was shouting during the attack, Dickenson yelled to Simons, who was in another part of the house, that the "law was coming" and they should leave after lights came on at

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a nearby house, according to the accounts.

Dickenson and John Ballard then left by a back door, one statement said.

After leaving, they went to the 200 block of Jefferson Village Drive, where Dickenson was living. Later, however, Dickenson's girlfriend told him she did not want the items from Lawler's place in her apartment and they were removed, a statement said.

Lawler's body was found about 10 a.m. Dec. 31. He had been dead about 12 hours, authorities said. Simons was the first arrested Jan. 11 after State Police received information from an informant a few days earlier. Simons then led police to Dickenson about an hour later and the Ballards were arrested about eight hours later in Florida.

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Staff Photos by Don Pennell

Carl Simons (left), Timothy Dickenson outside
They were better groomed than when arrested



Juanita M. Ballard was in handcuffs, shackles
Leg irons are put on when using a car for transport